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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 000464

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SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER HUANG AND CHAIRMAN BURGHARDT  
DISCUSS DIPLOMATIC CHALLENGES AND THE TRANSITION

Classified By: AIT Director Stephen M. Young,  
Reasons: 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Foreign Minister Huang told Chairman Burghardt and Director Young on March 28 that he remains worried about the possibility of further diplomatic losses to Beijing prior to President-elect Ma Ying-jeou's inauguration on May 20. Huang was most concerned that St. Kitts and Nevis might switch recognition in the near future, but he believed Panama would keep its promise to President Chen not to switch recognition while Chen was in office. The Foreign Ministry is working with John Feng, Ma's chief foreign policy advisor, on transition issues. End Summary.

¶2. (C) AIT Chairman Ray Burghardt, accompanied by Director Young, met with Foreign Minister James Huang on March 28 to discuss Taiwan's foreign policy challenges and the transition. Vice Minister Elizabeth Chu and MFA North American Affairs Director Leo Lee accompanied FM Huang. The Chairman and Director congratulated Taiwan for conducting a smooth and peaceful presidential election that showcased its strong democracy.

#### Diplomatic Challenges

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¶3. (C) Burghardt asked Huang about the state of Taiwan's diplomatic relations, especially with Panama, St. Kitts and Nevis, and partners in Africa. Huang expressed concern about the possibility of negative developments before Ma Ying-jeou's inauguration on May 20. According to Huang, Beijing has been telling Taiwan's diplomatic partners that the Ma administration will cut foreign aid, which has raised their concerns about Taipei's commitment to continue existing aid programs. The Foreign Ministry discussed this issue with Ma's transition office, which issued a statement that the new administration would honor Taiwan's commitments to its diplomatic partners. However, the day after this statement, Ma told the press that Taiwan would not engage in "check book diplomacy" or provide "aid" to individuals, which caused a negative reaction among Taiwan's partners. The Foreign

Ministry has worked to mitigate the damage by meeting with ambassadors resident in Taiwan, conveying a message on behalf of Ma's office that the new administration would not change previous commitments and would continue to cooperate and to strengthen bilateral relationships.

¶4. (C) Huang confided that St. Kitts and Nevis has negotiated a timetable with Beijing to switch recognition before May 20. Asked about Panama, Huang said he believed President Martin Torrijos would honor his promise to President Chen and not switch diplomatic ties to China before May 20, but after that he did not know. Even though President Chen had established very good relations with Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, Huang said he was not sure what would happen after Ma's inauguration. The Marshall Islands, he added, is also at risk as Beijing is working hard to entice Majuro to switch diplomatic recognition. Huang acknowledged that Taiwan is trying to woo some countries in Africa and the Caribbean away from Beijing.

Working with the MA Transition Team  
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¶5. (C) The Foreign Ministry is working with the Ma transition team, so far primarily on protocol for the inauguration and hand-over, and Huang said he would fully brief his successor. To facilitate a smooth transition, Huang's Chief of Staff has been working with Ma's chief foreign policy adviser John Feng. Feng has requested that a junior Foreign Service officer be assigned to Ma's office. The Foreign Ministry has also briefed Feng about countries with which diplomatic relations are unstable. The Director emphasized the importance of discussing the WHO and OECD issues with Ma's camp before the transition. (Note: Feng told the Director March 31 that ROC/Taiwan will not be applying for WHO membership at the WHA meeting in May this year.)

¶6. (C) Noting that it will be up to Ma's office to decide who to invite to the inauguration, Huang said he understood Ma is aiming for a simple, down-to-earth inauguration devoid of frivolity. Ma's office has asked the Foreign Ministry to inform Taiwan's diplomatic partners that their inaugural delegations will not be treated to a presidential suite or stretch-limo during their visits.

Ma Request to Visit the U.S.  
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¶7. (C) Huang wondered whether the U.S. would agree to a pre-inaugural visit by President-elect Ma Ying-jeou. He noted that Ma's office had not asked the Foreign Ministry to make the request through appropriate channels.

Comment  
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¶8. (C) Huang appeared tired and said he would have the greatest sympathy for his successor. He showed the Chairman and Director a framed Hong Kong news article about him with the headline "Taiwan Foreign Minister Hardest Job in the World." Given Beijing's continued efforts to persuade Taiwan's diplomatic remaining partners to switch recognition, Huang's successor could well face some foreign policy challenges right off the bat.

YOUNG